

[P.38]

CHAPTER IV

CHILDHOOD

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WHEN the child¹ has relinquished his attempts to recapture the preferred habits of infancy, his mother gives him a little bag which she has netted for him and his father the betel-chewing accoutrements to go with it. They tell him that he has become a little man. He now turns to the play group and spends his time playing games with other children, roaming in the forest, and participating to some extent in adult activities. The sexes avoid each other from this time, the boys and the girls forming separate play groups.

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The widening of a boy's contact with the environment necessitates new discriminations about the edibility of things. While playing in the forest he comes across luscious-looking berries which may cause his death if he does not know that they are poisonous. Kwoma boys play a game in which they kill lizards and snakes and cook and eat them in a playhouse² in the jungle. Some of these reptiles are good to eat; others are poisonous. The parents warn the child about the objects that are poisonous. When I went for a walk with a native, he would frequently point out some class of objects to be avoided. Children were as likely to teach me as adults. Once a little girl of eight was scathing in her comments about me because I did not know that a certain berry was not good to eat. Although I observed no specific example of an older sibling using this technique on a younger one, I feel confident that it occurred rather frequently. In any case, the training

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¹ Mey, Fit, Kwos, Gwamp, Ham, and Hamb—boys, and Añ, Buka, Haya, Toka, Kayamaka, and Yawa—girls, constituted the personnel of the childhood age group of Rumbina hamlet. Mey, Fit, Kwos, and Ham spent much of their time running in and out of my house and playing near by and therefore provided most of the observational data on the boys in this age group. Añ and Buka, who lived in houses next to mine, provided most of the data on girls.

² A rough bough hut which children construct for play.

Childhood

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of Kwoma children is very effective in this respect. Errors 861
and warnings sharply differentiate the things in the environ-824
ment which may, and those which may not, be eaten, with the 825
result that Kwoma children show a remarkable knowledge of 262
the local flora and fauna.

Parents provide their children with a general formula to keep them from eating harmful food. The formula is: if you do not know a thing is good to eat, do not try it. I have no data on how this fear of strangeness is transmitted to the child, but I did observe the fact that children generally reacted with fear to strange objects and persons.

A Kwoma child learns that, in addition to things naturally 869
inedible, there are also foods which are made poisonous by 754
sorcerers. Boys and girls are told never to eat food given 609
them by a stranger or a non-relative, for it may be poisoned 264
by the insertion of a magical white powder. As an example of parental training on this point, Wof refused to allow Mey and Fit to eat at my house because I bought bananas, paw-paws, yams, and other vegetables from people of other hamlets. He also warned us not to eat this food, for we might have enemies in the tribe who would try to poison us. Another illustration of the manner in which this eating restriction is inculcated occurred when Marok's dog died. It was his best hunting dog, and both he and his wife and sister were very fond of the animal. When it died, they wailed as they would have done for a member of the family. It died early one morning, and the women mourned throughout the day. By afternoon flies had gathered about the dead animal and laid their eggs upon it. Mey, Fit, and Buka were with me when Marok pointed to these flyblows and told me that this was the poisonous white powder which sorcerers use. This was definite proof, he said, that someone had tried to poison him or one of his family, but that the unfortunate dog had eaten the food instead and died as a result. All the children of the hamlet soon knew the imputed cause of the dog's death, and it is probable that this knowledge served to strengthen their fear of food not prepared by relatives.

A child is warned about another type of sorcery which also

Becoming a Kwoma

869 pertains to food but is concerned with how and where a per-
 754 son can safely eat rather than with what he can eat. A child
 609 is taught to be very careful with his crumbs and other food
 264 leavings. He is warned that, if someone steals such material
 and performs a certain magical rite upon it, he will sicken
 and die, and that, therefore, he should be particularly care-
 ful if he eats anywhere but in his own house. It is difficult for
 a thief of sorcery material to steal leavings from the floor or
 rubbish heap of your own dwelling because he would be killed
 on the spot if he were caught at it, but a sorcerer can pick up
 food leavings left in the forest with little danger of discov-
 [602] ery. Since relatives may not sorcerize one another, one may
 [571] eat in their houses if one is careful, but parents warn chil-
 dren never to eat in the house of a non-relative, for a crumb
 may fall, no matter how careful they may be, and non-rela-
 tives are not to be trusted. A child is warned that his blood is
 [826] another material which must be kept from the hands of sor-
 cerers: therefore, if he cut himself, he should take care to
 catch or wipe up the blood in a leaf which he should burn or
 [825] hide in a safe place. He is also warned that his blood "goes
 into" any animal that he kills, so that he must be careful not
 to spill the blood of such an animal.

869 A child does not have to be warned frequently about the
 754 dangers of sorcery because his parents show such fear of it.²
 152 Whenever anyone is sick in the hamlet, practically the only
 [321] subject of conversation is sorcery. Adults speculate about
 the identity of the sorcerer and curse those whom they sus-
 pect. Everyone is worried and emotional. The almost hysteri-
 cal reaction of his parents to sorcery impresses the serious-
 ness of the danger upon the child so vividly that it is not diffi-
 cult to teach him to be careful.

867 In addition to learning that he may not eat things natu-
 264 rally poisonous nor food contaminated by sorcery, the child
 is conditioned against eating food which belongs to someone
 else. In other words, he comes face to face with the property

[113] ² Emotional attitudes as well as overt habits are subject to imitation.
 See N. E. Miller and John Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation* (New
 Haven, 1941), chap. xiv.

821 just as he did as a child. He still believes that rain and wind
776 storms, thunder and lightning, earthquakes, and rainbows
are caused by angry *marsalai*.²⁸ Although he takes care not
to walk near the dwelling places of these supernatural beings,
he reacts aggressively toward them after they have brought
about the annoying natural event. If a storm is brewing, a
Kwoma man will customarily repeat an imprecation: "Cursed
marsalai who is causing this storm to come, may you be
killed. May you be bound hand and foot so that you cannot
move. May you be stuffed in the bottom of a hollow tree so
that you may no longer annoy us with rain and wind."²⁹ At
the end of each line of the imprecation, the cursing man spits
toward the oncoming storm.

753 Many Kwoma men learn to abstract the unseen sago
755 needles which *marsalai* sometimes shoot into the feet of those
[776] who disturb them. The method employed consists of rubbing
the painful spot with a leaf and of repeating a malediction
which supposedly causes the needle to come near to the sur-
face. The operator then sucks the painful spot, extracts the
needle, and spits it on a coconut leaf, which is wrapped up,
immersed in water for a time, and then thrown away.

• 825 When the clouds of mosquitoes are thicker and hungrier
776 than usual, it is believed to be the work of *marsalai*. A huge
supernatural crocodile is supposed to live somewhere in the
great swamp below the range on which the Kwoma dwell.
Mosquitoes make their home in the belly of this monster and
swarm out to pester the Kwoma when he opens his mouth.

825 When this occurs, or rather when the mosquitoes are so thick
776 that it is believed to have occurred, the men of one or another
789 of the Kwoma hamlets will beat a special rhythm on the
house tambran gongs, a message to this *marsalai*, angrily
commanding him to shut his mouth. The men of other ham-

[823] ²⁸ Earthquakes are believed to be caused by a huge *marsalai* when he
thrusts his digging stick into the ground as he plants yams. If anyone
should approach his swamp dwelling, the Kwoma fear that mountains would
be leveled by the terrible quake that would ensue. Rainbows are thought to
be caused by another *marsalai* when he spits betel juice through the sky.

²⁹ The curse is repeated for all the *marsalai* who are suspected in the
particular instance.

Adulthood

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lets, when they hear this rhythm, rush to their own house tamberans and repeat the rhythm on their gongs. The *mar-salai* must tremble, it is said, when he hears the thunderous command issuing successively from each house tamberan in each of the Kwoma subtribes. Doubtless he hastily shuts his mouth.

A Kwoma male must submit to the hazing of age-grade initiation even after he has reached adulthood. There are four occasions on which he attends this ceremony as an initiate, and, since it takes place only once every five years, there are normally three rites during adulthood when he must permit his *ceremonial father* to slash his tongue and penis. Thus it is not until a man is over thirty that he ceases to be an initiate. On each occasion he advances a degree in prestige and is permitted to wear a certain hair ornament that those of lower grades may not wear. Just as the newly initiated adolescent derogated the uninitiated children, so the adult derogates those in stages below him and struts about wearing his newly acquired headgear.

After a man has passed through the initiation cycle, he takes his turn as an initiator. He adopts a *ceremonial son* whom he sponsors through the cycle. Finally, at the age of fifty or more, after twenty years as an initiate and twenty years as an initiator, he attends the age-grade ceremonies merely as a spectator.

The attitude of an adult man toward ghosts differs little from that of a child. He still reacts to them with a mixture of aggression and avoidance. Kwoma men are quite loath to walk very far from their dwellings after dark, and if they do so they either carry a torch or wear a dagger made from a human thigh bone, both of which are supposed to frighten ghosts and make them keep their distance. In spite of these precautions, men not infrequently encounter what they believe to be ghosts. One evening I heard frightened shouting, then the patter of feet rushing by the house, and finally angry shouts and imprecations from the house tamberan. The next morning I learned that Kar and Marok had stayed late on a visit to another hamlet and had been forced to re-

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132 several clear and fresh days and cool nights - wonderful for sleep. And
132 even more important is the fact that the mosquitos are very few. Why this
136 is so we have no idea. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to their

• [825] coming and goings. The natives have a belief that they move in a body at
this time from the river villages, Yambon, Nalu, etc., up to the Hongwan
where they stop for a time. Then they visit each of the other Kwoma
settlements in turn before moving off to the north.

123 Our gathering of data in the last week has largely been influenced by
events in the lives of individuals and ceremonial affairs. Plans for the
day's work which we make in the morning often fall by the way before noon.
For example, a week ago a small boy who is often about the house came
running in to say that Mar, one of the Hongwan youths who fetches water and
firewood for us, was dead. We had given him permission to go to his bush
house and garden over near Ambunti Mt. two days before, and he had gone off in
good spirits. This gave us a jolt. We asked if he were "dead finish".
The answer came "no got, dead liklik dasol".

We packed a few medicines and immediately started out with a half
dozen of Mar's kin over the same gruelling track which had nearly killed us
several weeks ago. When we arrived we found Mar sitting near a fire list-
less and moaning. They all agreed that it was a case of 'poison' because
[753] of the suddenness of the attack and because the patient could not 'talk
straight'. Even we could notice that he was mousing his words when we
could get him to answer a question. He complained of intestinal pains, but
no headache, and his temperature was exactly normal. We thought it best to
get him back to his house proper and out of the wet swampy hollow where he
was. He protested and did not have the strength to stand on his own feet.

123 We gave him a strong purgative. During this time Wof, his father's elder
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Yevelas came by and reported that last night there was some sort of fight at Sumre Sumre. They were vague about it, but the upshot of it is that somebody burned someone else's house. Oviyap shook his head and said he thought there would be trouble.

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Oviyap and Mae just voiced their disgust at the Yambon because they defecated close to the house. Mae dreamed last night that "masta Bobbid" came and brought plenty of "lap lapa," singlets, etc. and gave them to him.

Oviyap napped this afternoon and dreamed something about Mae and woke up calling to him.

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April 12, 1937. Last night after I had gone to bed (about 9:30), the Tangvishamps began beating their gongs. First there was a message on a big gong, and then the rhythm was carried out on all the gongs: kuratum kuratum kuratum kuratum kuratum kuratum kuratum kura kura kura .

Soon afterward, this was repeated at Sombundura, and then at Afokolis. Then Kaya called out to Oviyap, who ran down to Rumbina, and Yat, Way, and Oviyap repeated the message. They were sending it to Wasamanj, a sugilawas (carved wooden figure) in the form of a crocodile, who lives in the sage swamp on the road between here and Tangvishamp. Wasamanj was responsible for sending the mosquitoes which had come up in a great swarm in the evening. There was such a swarm outside my net that their humming seemed almost deafening; everyone was restless and clapping and shouting. It is believed that the mosquitoes live in the belly of this margala and that Wasamanj is responsible for sending or letting them out. The gong message was sent out in the form of a threat, and not as a prayer. The pleasure of running down and playing on the gongs, as well as the irritation against the mosquitoes, definitely entered into the stimulus for the action. Wasamanj is a sugilawas of the Wanyi people.

Ethnophysiology

826 The heart (mesuk) is the seat of life. It controls the breath
827 which comes through the nose or the mouth. If a man's heart is injured, he
dies. It is located where the ribs join the sternum in the little soft spot
just under the breastbone. It is visible by day in the faint pulsating
seen at this point. At night the mesuk moves up to the small depression
just below the Adam's apple. It sleeps while the organism does. A
person must not be awakened suddenly lest the mesuk have enough time to
return to the daytime position. It is supposed to wake itself first; then
the person opens his eyes. The mesuk is small in a child and proportionately
larger as the man or woman grows. It is strong in a strong man and weak
in a weak one. Birds, snakes, and other animals as well as ghosts also
[825] have mesuk.
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Food goes in at the mouth, down the neck, and into the stomach where
it stays for a while. At the time of defecation, it goes down the intestines
and out the anus. Water goes directly to the bladder where it stops until
time for urination, when it goes down and out the penis. Sperm is said to
be produced in the bladder. The testicles are thought to have no function.
Lungs are hung up on either side of the stomach but have no connection with
the stomach.

Eyes have a small rope but it is not connected with anything. Neither
are the holes in nose or ears connected with anything. The holes in the
ears just stop.

The veins and arteries (nensawa) are to make the skin strong. They
are unconnected and unrelated with the other vital organs. Blood is
everywhere inside the skin. The kidneys are to make the back strong,
as is the heart which is also for breath.

775 Spirit beliefs. Pigs, birds, dogs, opossum, mosquitoes, or anything that
825 walks, flies and breathes, are believed to have ghosts (gamba). Gamba have
hearts (maguh) the same as living men and animals, but in the dead the
maguh is located in the throat as in a sleeping man. Here it keeps on beating.
Gamba go about in this way with all the organs of the human being,
but do not eat food.

When a man is out hunting pig at night he may see a ghost. The gamba
[763] are cowardly by nature. If they meet a strong man they run away; it is only
people who are about to die who are surrounded by them. Men who die violently,
as in an intertribal fight, see no gamba before they are killed.